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Western Ahwatukee home sales lag

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Maybe it's because of the proposed South Mountain Freeway, with its tentative route right smack through Ahwatukee Foothills.

Or maybe blame the high prices of upper-scale homes, or perhaps the lack of a school district.

But however you slice it, the hardest place to sell a home in Ahwatukee Foothills is in the west.

Only 10 homes sold in June in the 85045 ZIP code, which includes everything west of Central Avenue, according to a calculation by Realty Executives Ahwatukee. The bulk of that area is the Club West and Ahwatukee Foothills Reserve communities.

In contrast, the larger 85044 ZIP code had 72 sales, and 85048 recorded 69 sales in June.

The western 85045 ZIP code is the smallest in Ahwatukee Foothills, representing only 17 percent of all the homes for sale.

Not everyone is convinced the possibility of a freeway coming through the area's southern edge is hurting sales. Under current Arizona Department of Transportation plans, some homes in the 85045 ZIP code would have to be razed to make way for the planned South Mountain Freeway.

"I think the freeway (proposal) has had an effect," said Sally Martinez, who is trying to sell a home that would border the freeway's frontage road if the highway were built. "There are people apprehensive about purchasing for that reason. I just moved up to a house on the hill. The freeway hasn't chased me away."

She just dropped the price on her home to \$574,000, from \$615,000, "to be realistic with the market."

Realtor Jodi Erwin, another resident of the Ahwatukee Foothills Reserve and an agent with Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in Tempe, agrees that the freeway stigma hurts.

"The worst part is having it be up in the air so long," Erwin said.

But Realtor Jay Freeman doubts the freeway is affecting sales because it is years away and years from being built.

"At this stage, I don't think the freeway is having any effect. Give it another few years, and it will have a big effect. There are still a lot of people who believe the freeway will never be built anyway," he said.

Geoffrey Robinson, a pharmacist recently transferred from Phoenix to Seattle, had purchased a house in the Reserve, knowing the freeway might someday go in.

He actually believes the freeway, when finished in 2015, would help the isolated area because it would allow residents to get places faster.

Meanwhile, his Reserve home remains on the market. It has been on sale since October and he can't buy a home in Seattle until it sells.

There are other reasons why homes may not be selling as well in western Ahwatukee Foothills.

For one thing, it is not in a school district. Parents have to apply to local school districts and aren't guaranteed a space at their closest school. It hasn't been a problem at the elementary school level because schools aren't so crowded.

But space is especially tight at the main two high schools in Ahwatukee Foothills, said Linda Littell, Tempe Union's director of communications.

Also, Ahwatukee Foothills homes on the average tend to be more expensive, according to *The Arizona Republic* Valley Homes Values section, published in March, which gave the overall 2005 median prices for new and existing homes. Ahwatukee's 85045 ZIP code came in highest in the Southeast Valley at \$430,000.

And finally, residents in western Ahwatukee Foothills face the longest commute around South Mountain, although Pecos Road helps. Martinez said her husband works in west Phoenix and his daily commute is 85 minutes.

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